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Brainstorming

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Variations: There are many versions of brainstorming, including round-robin brainstorming, wildest-idea brainstorming, double reversal, starbursting and the charette procedure. The basic version described below is sometimes called free-form, freewheeling or unstructured brainstorming.

See also: [nominal group technique](#) and [fishbone diagram](#)

Brainstorming is a method for generating a large number of creative ideas in a short period of time.

When to Use Brainstorming

- When a broad range of options is desired.
- When creative, original ideas are desired.
- When participation of the entire group is desired.

Brainstorming Procedure

Materials needed: flipchart, marking pens, tape and blank wall space.

1. Review the rules of brainstorming with the entire group:
 - No criticism, no evaluation, no discussion of ideas.
 - There are no stupid ideas. The wilder the better.
 - All ideas are recorded.
 - Piggybacking is encouraged: combining, modifying, expanding others' ideas.
2. Review the topic or problem to be discussed. Often it is best phrased as a "why," "how," or "what" question. Make sure everyone understands the subject of the brainstorm.
3. Allow a minute or two of silence for everyone to think about the question.
4. Invite people to call out their ideas. Record all ideas, in words as close as possible to those used by the contributor. No discussion or evaluation of any kind is permitted.
5. Continue to generate and record ideas until several minutes' silence produces no more.

Brainstorming Considerations

- Judgment and creativity are two functions that cannot occur simultaneously. That's the reason for the rules about no criticism and no evaluation.
- Laughter and groans are criticism. When there is criticism, people begin to evaluate their ideas before stating them. Fewer ideas are generated and creative ideas are lost.

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- Evaluation includes positive comments such as “Great idea!” That implies that another idea that did not receive praise was mediocre.
- The more the better. Studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between the total number of ideas and the number of good, creative ideas.
- The crazier the better. Be unconventional in your thinking. Don’t hold back any ideas. Crazy ideas are creative. They often come from a different perspective.
- Crazy ideas often lead to wonderful, unique solutions, through modification or by sparking someone else’s imagination.
- Hitchhike. Piggyback. Build on someone else’s idea.
- When brainstorming with a large group, someone other than the facilitator should be the recorder. The facilitator should act as a buffer between the group and the recorder(s), keeping the flow of ideas going and ensuring that no ideas get lost before being recorded.
- The recorder should try not to rephrase ideas. If an idea is not clear, ask for a rephrasing that everyone can understand. If the idea is too long to record, work with the person who suggested the idea to come up with a concise rephrasing. The person suggesting the idea must always approve what is recorded.
- Keep all ideas visible. When ideas overflow to additional flipchart pages, post previous pages around the room so all ideas are still visible to everyone.

Excerpted from Nancy R. Tague’s *The Quality Toolbox*, Second Edition, ASQ Quality Press, 2004, pages 126–127, 131–132.



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